



Testimony Opposing the Governor's Proposed Budget for the Office of Early Childhood
Nicole Updegrove
Appropriations Committee
2/21/17

Senator Slossberg, Senator Somers, Representative Rosario, Representative Kokoruda, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. **We are submitting this testimony in opposition to the Governor's proposed budget for the Office of Early Childhood.**

We have two primary concerns:

- 1. We oppose the reduction of the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy.**
- 2. We oppose the transfer of Birth to Three out of the Office of Early Childhood.**

We are also concerned about the reduction or elimination of other, smaller line items, including Healthy Start, Even Start, and Help Me Grow. Though small, they are crucial and efficient parts of our state's early childhood system. You will hear from other advocates today about these line items. Our testimony will focus on the two largest changes in the Governor's proposed budget.

- 1. We oppose the reduction of the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy.**

Maintaining the closure of Care 4 Kids is not a tenable component of the solution to the state's fiscal crisis. Care 4 Kids provides low-income working families with child care subsidies so that parents can work while their children have access to safe, high-quality early care and education. About 30% of children under 5 in families with one or more working parents qualify for Care 4 Kids due to their parents' low income. Among children of single parents, about 50% of children qualify.¹ The program is currently closed to almost all new families,² and as of January 12, 2017, more than 2,500 families are on the waitlist.³

The Governor's proposed biennium budget reduces funding for Care 4 Kids by \$9.3 million in FY 2018 and an additional \$5.2 million (for a total of \$14.5 million in cuts) in FY 2019. The stated implication is that **under this budget, the program would remain closed to new applications until mid-fiscal year 2019.**

In 49% of towns, Care 4 Kids is the only form of state subsidy for child care: these towns lack public school preschool, School Readiness, state-funded child development centers, or Head Start programs (see Appendix).⁴ For families in these towns, Care 4 Kids is the only way to make quality day care and preschool affordable. **Without subsidies, many families who are unable to afford**

licensed child care have to reduce their working hours, leave work altogether, or leave their children in unsafe settings. Any one of these “choices” leaves families at great risk.

Moreover, the closure of the Care 4 Kids program has far-reaching effects upon other providers. Many early childhood providers report financial difficulties posed by new families’ inability to pay while subsidies are unavailable. This includes other state-subsidized programs like School Readiness, whose financial structure is designed to include Care 4 Kids funding. These problems are expected to worsen as children currently in the program age out of early care and education and enter K-12 schooling. **The sustained closure of Care 4 Kids will not only impact the families who need it, but the entire child care system across the state.**

2. We oppose the transfer of Birth to Three out of the Office of Early Childhood.

Small efficiencies should not be prioritized over effective service delivery. Birth to Three provides early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and to their families. **Birth to Three and its administration require extensive experience and expertise in early childhood.**

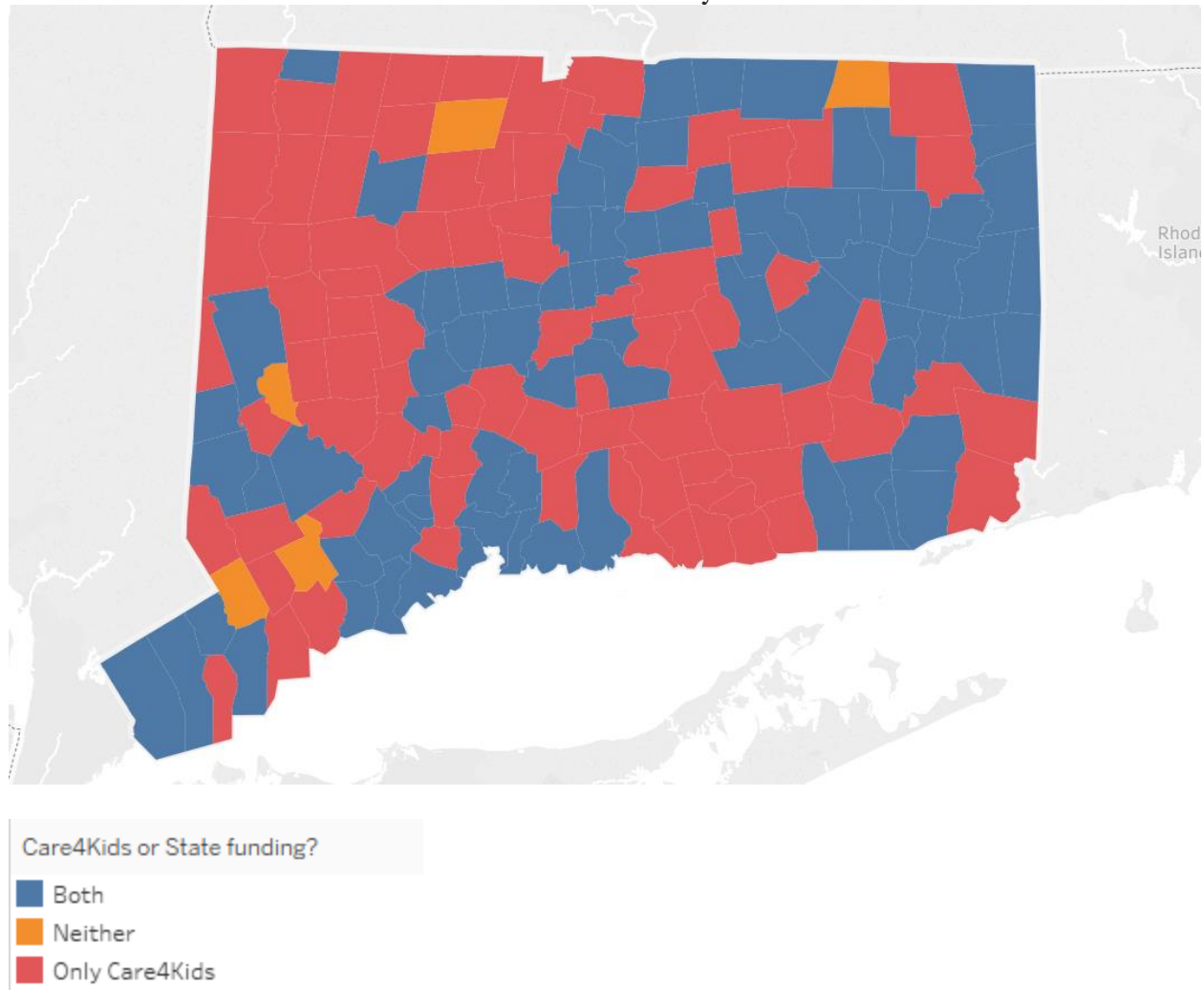
The OEC was created with the aim of consolidating under one roof the dizzying variety of programs and funding streams related to early childhood in the state. By creating an agency that could look at early childhood as a whole, the state took the first steps towards compiling a coherent early childhood system to support our state’s youngest children and their families. **National research shows that fragmented early care and education (ECE) delivery systems “limit effectiveness in delivering a seamless continuum of services to children and families,** who may frequently utilize services across these siloed systems, experiencing cumbersome and duplicative processes, varied eligibility and enrollment requirements, and undue inconvenience.”⁵

Our state should continue making steps to unify and support its early childhood system, not dismantle it. **Birth to Three should remain under the domain of the Office of Early Childhood.**

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions and can be reached at nupdegrove@ctvoices.org or 203-498-4240, extension 107.

Appendix

Towns with Care 4 Kids and Other State-Funded Early Care and Education⁶



¹ CT Voices analysis of 2015 Census microdata.

² Due to funding deficiencies in FY 2017, on August 1, 2016, the program closed to new applicants from low-income families. On December 31, 2016, the program closed to teen parents and former TANF recipients as well. Families already receiving Care 4 Kids do continue receiving the subsidy, as long as they continue to meet qualifications, but only current TANF recipients can newly enter the program.

³ Reported by Harriet Feldlaufer, OEC, during a January 20, 2017 meeting of the Early Childhood Cabinet.

⁴ CT Voices analysis of town-by-town state-funded early care and education programs. Data provided by Julie Bisi, Office of Early Childhood, and publically available data.

⁵ Julia Coffman, Kathy Glazer, Susan Hibbard, and Kristin Wiggins. "Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences." BUILD. November 2010.

⁶ CT Voices analysis of town-by-town state-funded early care and education programs. Data provided by Julie Bisi, Office of Early Childhood, and other publically available data.